

# 2010



Planning and Development Services  
Exit 90 / Carowinds Blvd Master Plan  
Adopted: December 20, 2010

*The intent of this document is to set forth a unified and focused plan for development and infrastructure improvements in the Exit 90 / Carowinds Boulevard area based on stakeholder consensus, staff analysis, and a common vision for the area.*

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# **INTRODUCTION**

## **Project Description**

Exit 90, the access between Interstate 77 (I-77), SC 51, and Carowinds Boulevard (US 21), is the gateway into South Carolina from North Carolina, and it offers a first impression of the Palmetto State and York County to many driving south on I-77. Unfortunately, the impression that most get is not representative of York County or the State of South Carolina. Despite the many local initiatives that have taken place to address the looming issues that attribute to this, mainly to remove litter from the road rights of way, recent efforts have been minimal. This has left some stakeholders wondering why these efforts stopped, and if there is real promise in attempts to renew interest.

Fortunately, most stakeholders maintain a positive vision for the Exit 90 / Carowinds Boulevard area and understand that despite its present state, the gateway area offers excellent long-term development potential. In addition, many recognize that although there are issues, there are also many assets providing considerable opportunities to improve the aesthetics, functionality, and economic conditions in the area. These assets create the potential to transform this gateway into a major economic engine in York County with commercial and industrial development that will complement the current mix of uses.

Perhaps, because of the existing potential of the area, many stakeholders showed great interest in being part of the master planning effort which kicked off in early 2010 with an opening stakeholder meeting. Local landowners as well as several business owners and representatives came forward to offer insight on possibilities for the area. Various South Carolina agencies immediately endorsed the effort including the Department of Transportation and the Department of Commerce. Local governments and various government organizations also came to offer support toward improving the area such as the Town of Fort Mill, York County, the York County Tourism Bureau, the York County Economic Development Board, and the Fort Mill Economic Development Board.

The kick-off meeting, in addition to the distribution of a survey to all land and business owners, was intended to pinpoint the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities in the Exit 90 / Carowinds Boulevard Area. This event was the first in a series of meetings with several stakeholders in the Exit 90 area. Using information obtained through the surveys, group meetings, and one-on-one meetings; both problems and solutions began to emerge.

Common themes that emerged include:

- Aesthetic issues such as a lack of landscaping, poorly kept properties, and lack of investment;
- Regulatory issues including metal structures, dilapidated buildings, and excessive signage;
- A lack of diversity among types of businesses in the area ;
- Transportation issues including congestion, dangerous merging, and destructive truck traffic; and



- A lack of organization among business / land owners / local and state public representatives working to improve the area to achieve its full potential.

In order to address these issues and many others, this plan is divided into specific sections that outline the primary challenges recognized through the planning process and a series of recommendations that may lead to their resolution. The final section of the plan summarizes all recommendations and includes a timeline for implementation.

Before exploring the most outstanding issues in the Exit 90 / Carowinds Boulevard area and their potential solutions, it is important to highlight the many assets that will play an important role in the area’s redevelopment. These include low taxes, vacant land for development, excellent access to I-77, and a variety of potential partners to aid in the implementation of the plan.

### Study Area

The study area consists of 265 parcels in an 1870.8 acre area, centering on the intersection of I-77 and US 21 at Exit 90. The study area consists of parcels within 500 feet (more or less) of the following roads: Carowinds Blvd (US 21) west of Interstate-77, US 21 east of Interstate-77 to Flint Hill Road, Springhill Farm Road to SC 51, and SC 51 to the state line. The study area excludes all residentially zoned properties.

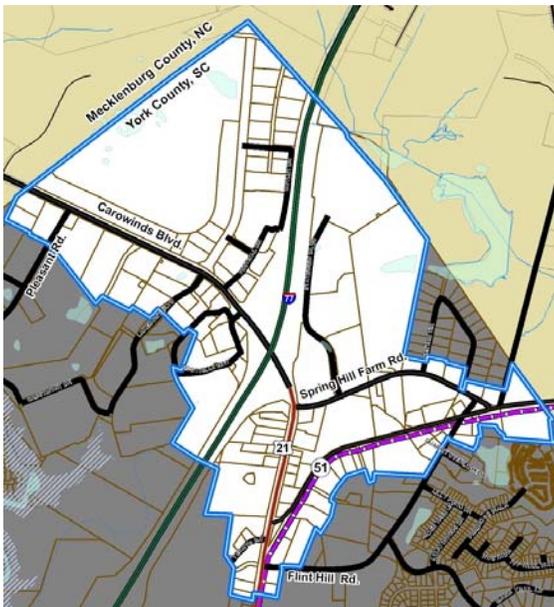


Figure 1: Study Area

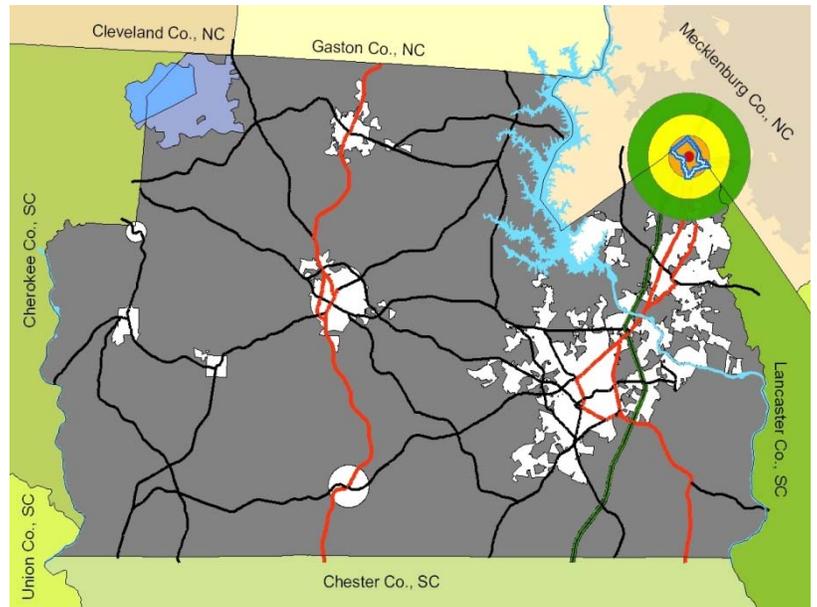


Figure 2: Study Area Location



## **ASSETS**

Despite its present state, the Exit 90 area offers excellent development potential with access to regional destinations such as Carowinds and Plaza Fiesta; several major employment centers such as Lakemont Business Park and Lakemont West; access to the residential communities of Fort Mill, Tega Cay, and South Charlotte; as well as excellent regional access via I-77. These assets provide a considerable opportunity to improve the aesthetics, functionality, and economic conditions in the area.

### **Potential Partners**

The most significant resource beneficial to the implementation of this plan and towards general improvements in the Exit 90 area are partnerships. Without collaborative efforts between public and private entities, very few gains will be made and the status quo will prevail. Fortunately, if there is one thing that most agree on, it is that maintaining the status quo is unacceptable in the Exit 90 area.

With several major corporations within the Exit 90 area, there are many potential champions for implementing future improvements. Carowinds, Wendy's, and other publicly held companies have already stepped forward with pledges of support for implementing specific elements of the plan. In addition to these companies, several independently owned companies as well as the South Carolina Department of Transportation and the South Carolina Department of Commerce have expressed their support. The Arrowood Business Association, serving areas of both southern Mecklenburg County and Northern York County, has also stepped forward offering their networking, marketing, and political resources.

### **Tax Rates**

Most South Carolina tax rates are lower than the national average and, in some cases, significantly lower than those of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC, which surrounds the Exit 90 / Carowinds area. Most notable tax dissimilarities include property taxes, gasoline taxes, and liquor taxes. These are illustrated in Table 1.

<b><u>ITEM</u></b>	<b><u>York County, SC</u></b>	<b><u>Char-Meck, NC</u></b>
<b>Property taxes</b>		
<b>% of Home Median Value</b>	0.49%	1.45%
<b>% of Median Income</b>	3.70%	1.24%
<b>Gasoline</b>	\$0.17	\$0.30
<b>Liquor</b>	\$5.42 per gallon	\$13.39 per gallon*

**Table 1: NC / SC Tax Differential**

In addition, there are more moderate tax differentials between York County, SC and Charlotte, North Carolina in income and sales taxes on consumer goods that favor commerce in South Carolina.

\* State government controls all sales, the implied excise tax rate is calculated using methodology designed by the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States



## Access

Most individuals surveyed rated access and location to Exit 90 as one the area's most positive features. Close proximity to I-77, US 21, and SC 51 offers an enormous amount of traffic and visibility for the area. Two roads, US 21 and SC 51, carry an average of approximately 65,000 vehicles per day combined through the Exit 90 area. I-77 carries nearly 70,000 vehicles south of the Carowinds Boulevard exit and 128,600 as it goes north into North Carolina. A significant portion of this traffic travels on US 21 to access Carowinds, which hosts approximately 1 million visitors annually between the months of March and October.

## Funded Road Projects

Additional road improvements and congestion relieving measures are currently planned and funded in the Exit 90 area. These improvements include projects funded by a 2009 Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program grant in the sum of \$2,250,000 to be administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT). The project includes the following improvements to be built as a three phase project:

### *Phase 1:*

- The provision of a free-flow right turn lane on Springhill Farm Road from the intersection of Stateview Boulevard to the northbound on-ramp for I-77 will significantly reduce traffic on Carowinds Boulevard generated by the Wells Fargo office complex by allowing those traveling on I-77 northbound direct access to the interstate;

### *Phase 2:*

- Reconfigure the existing intersection of Springhill Farm Road and Flint Hill Road to create a right angle crossing, a safer and more efficient alternative to the existing configuration;
- Abandon approximately 350-feet of Springhill Farm Road to eliminate the existing intersection alignment issues; and

### *Phase 3:*

- Provide southbound double left turn lanes on US 21 onto SC 51 and extend the existing median along US 21 south of I-77 to create more controlled turn movements

## Zoning

The predominant current zoning district in the Exit 90 area, Urban Development (UD), has been the root of many aesthetic and land use issues by allowing the current “hodgepodge” development pattern. However, two ordinances adopted in the recent past will guide future developments away from the status quo and toward a more attractive and sustainable pattern of development.

Commercial Design Standards were adopted in 2007 as part of the Interim Development Ordinance. This ordinance requires developments to implement design features that provide the following:



- Architectural standards and building design requirements for all buildings on arterial roads in York County;
- Compact and walkable development patterns interconnected with adjacent commercial and residential development;
- Safe, convenient and attractive parking areas.

The Arterial Roads Development Standards Overlay was adopted in 2000 with the intent to preserve and enhance the appearance of arterial roads and ensure safe travel. Applied to SC 51 and US 21, the overlay district

- Sets curb cut spacing, reducing congestion issues;
- Reduces sign clutter through freestanding sign regulations; and
- Enhances the appearance of major / minor arterial roads with supplemental landscaping and parking regulations.

In addition to these ordinances, the current regulations within the UD zoning district no longer allows any UD rezonings to occur.

### **Vacant / Significantly Underutilized Land**

The existing quantity of vacant and significantly underutilized land near the Exit 90 interchange is an asset contributing toward the possibility of future success. Although these vacant properties are partially the cause for some of the aesthetic issues in the area, the appearance of disconnected and disjointed land uses is far better than an overabundance of dilapidated commercial properties, derelict residential complexes, and vacant industrial sites. Although some of these scenarios exist to an extent within the study area, the inventory of vacant properties is far greater.

While some vacant parcels are at key intersections and locations in the study area, as exhibited by Figure 3, most are located on the periphery of the study area. This may create some challenges to attracting retail and service related uses, as these parcels are better suited for office or industrial development. However, large tracts do remain that have excellent road access and visibility, and these parcels have the potential to host a catalyst project which is vital to spurring new growth in the Exit 90 / Carowinds Boulevard area.

In addition to the properties in green, which are those recognized as being significantly underutilized on a conservative scale, there are other properties with high potential for redevelopment in the future.

### **Varied Potential Funding Sources**

Although the current economic climate continues to be unsure, there are several existing potential funding sources. These include FHWA programs such as Congestion Mitigation Air Quality funds, C-funds, and enhancement funds. Other funding sources include the SC hospitality tax, Designated Development funding (associated with Carowinds), and the SCDOT. These sources alone in combination with the determination of the local stakeholders make this implementation of this plan more than a remote possibility.



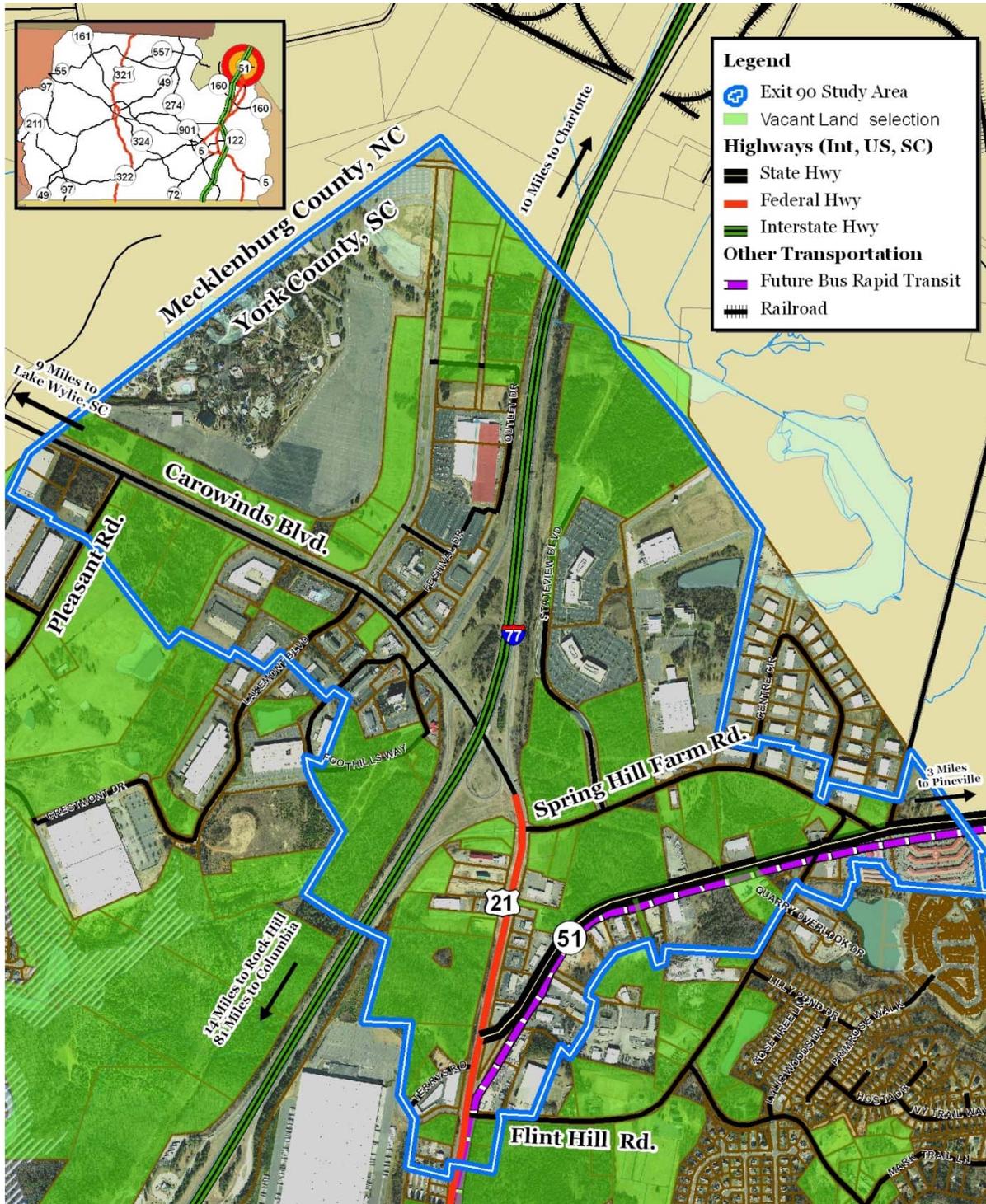


Figure 3: Inventory of Vacant Land

## **ISSUES & RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Exit 90 / Carowinds Boulevard area is dominated by disjointed land uses and challenging lot configurations. The aesthetic quality of the area is poor with a nonexistent streetscape, excessive land coverage, and intermittently distressed properties. The pedestrian environment is dangerous at best, traffic congestion is relatively high, and connectivity is deficient. These shortcomings may contribute to crime and safety concerns in this area and lack of appeal to real estate investors interested in creating quality developments.

With the cooperation of stakeholders and community partners, these concerns can be resolved in the future by focusing energies, collaborative efforts, and continuing the momentum created during the master planning process. In this section, each issue is briefly described, and future actions are outlined with the intention of overcoming the shortfall.

### **Aesthetics**

Among the many issues confronting the Exit 90 area, the general aesthetics are of the most concern according to surveys collected from land and businesses owners and operators. Aesthetics have been a primary impetus for all past efforts, as well as the efforts put forth in developing this plan. Unfortunately, conditions in the Exit 90 area are far beyond a quick fix or something that can continue to be ignored. The overall appearance of the Exit 90 area will not be improved overnight as the effort will require both public and private interests coming together to implement real strategies for improvement.

### **Dilapidated Structures**

Dilapidated buildings are scattered about the area, many of which are remnants of the video gambling industry once legal in South Carolina. Many other properties are occupied but simply unkempt. These buildings decrease property values, reduce tax revenues, discourage development and are potential fire hazards and magnets for crime. However, they also offer tremendous redevelopment opportunities.



Figure 5: Vacant Building on SC 51



Figure 4: Vacant Concrete Plant on SC 51

## **Recommendations: Dilapidated Structures**

Dealing with dilapidated structures can be extremely difficult due to the varied causes for their demise. Unfortunately, there is no one remedy that can address these buildings. What can be done is the continuous reporting of perceived building code violations without apprehension. Code enforcement staff will investigate all reported violations and address them as necessary. Even if it is determined that a code violation is not present on the property, this still brings the issue to the attention of County staff so that the situation can be monitored.

In the future, it may be beneficial to pass general non-residential building maintenance standards. These standards, successfully adopted in other communities in the region, can address a wider variety of interior and exterior building maintenance issues that can cause a nuisance to the surrounding property owners and detract from the overall character of the area.

As stated, future problems will partially be quelled by the successful completion and adoption of the Unified Development Ordinance as well as the existing Arterial Roads Overlay and the Commercial Design Standards. However, for structures currently causing health, welfare and /or safety issues; code enforcement should be notified immediately to begin finding a remedy to the situation.

## **Signage**

Another element detracting from the aesthetic qualities of the Exit 90 areas is excessive signage. Signage seems to permeate every space as illegally posted off-premise signs, local advertisements, and directional signs clutter road frontage. This stems from multiple factors including extremely high traffic volumes, the need for visibility by businesses located behind the road frontage, and limited code enforcement staffing.



Figure 7: Sign Clutter on Carowinds Blvd.



Figure 6: Dilapidated Sign Structure

Although business and directional signs are important components of the landscape necessary for both advertising and safety, the combined result of these competing communications is a right of way cluttered with messages advertising “eat here”, “we buy houses”, “no parking, no parking, no parking” and the like. The visual impact of this is a lasting image of the community.

Therefore, there must be a balance found between excessive signage to the point of diminishing returns and overregulation with the intent to preserve the character of the area.

### **Recommendations: Signage**

In order to reduce sign clutter and increase visibility for local business with limited or no access to Carowinds Boulevard, it is recommended that businesses within close proximity of one another (such as Plaza Fiesta, Papa Pino’s, and Frugal McDougal) unify under a multi tenant retail center as shown in Figure 8. This will allow the businesses in the “complex” to construct a permanent multi tenant commercial sign at the entrance of their access off of Carowinds Boulevard in addition to their onsite signage. This concept would require coordination among business and property owners, SCDOT, and York County.

Further in the future, as additional commercial and office tenants come into the Exit 90 area, a wayfinding strategy should be designed and implemented to aid motorists and pedestrians in safely navigating the streets and sidewalks. This will continue to add visibility to local businesses, assuming they exist in a multi-tenant development, and reduce confusion in accessing lodging, shopping areas, Carowinds, etcetera.



Figure 8: Multitenant Sign



Figure 9: Wayfinding Sign

### **Landscaping and Curb Appeal**

The benefits of landscaping in the right of way and along roadsides have been recognized for decades as exemplified in a 1962 lecture by Wilbur H. Simonson, former Chief of the Bureau of Public Roads. He stated, “The appropriate application of landscape principles can relieve the monotony and promote the safety of traffic by reawakening the interest and attention of drivers.”

Judging by the responses to open ended questions in the survey, many stakeholders agree with this statement by sharing the view that landscaping can dramatically increase the appeal of the Exit 90 area as a whole, and possibly, improve its recognition as the gateway to York County.

The needs for landscaping improvements are not limited to roadsides along Carowinds Boulevard; there are several safety features present that, while serving their purpose, create the appearance of dilapidation and disinvestment. One example of this is the rusted chain-link fencing bordering the Exit 90 interchange. While the fencing is a necessary safety feature intended to keep wild animals out of the interstate, there must be an alternative that, while serving the same function, may create a more inviting appearance to the gateway of South Carolina.

Although this fencing is owned and maintained by the South Carolina Department of Transportation, they cannot be held responsible for the installation and upkeep of more polished and landscaped safety infrastructure due to extremely limited funding. This requires that these duties be addressed by other public entities and private initiatives.

These initiatives exist on other exits in York County and are an example of how a simple, low maintenance picket fence with native planting can transform an area.



Figure 11: Exit 90, Fencing adjacent to I-77 Right of Way



Figure 10: Exit 82, Fencing Adjacent to I-77 Right of Way

### **Recommendations: Landscaping and Curb Appeal**

Adding landscaping and other improvements that add “curb appeal” are truly the simplest ways to create a noticeable and immediate impact in the Exit 90 area. This effort will require some level of participation from both public and private interests in the area and is an excellent opportunity for partnership. There are many potential projects in the Exit 90 / Carowinds Blvd. area including:

- The installation of street trees, shrubs, perennials, grass and/or wildflowers along the road right of way;

- The installation of a more attractive fence in front of a lowered chainlink fence adorned with the appropriate landscaping to replace / accompany SCDOT fencing;
- The replacement of concrete medians with planted medians with landscaped barrier medians;
- Adding improvements to the Carowinds entrance to resemble that of the Lakemont business park; and
- Actively seek partners to aid in upkeep and maintenance of public plantings.

Unfortunately, this list is not exhaustive, but it does offer some points where improvements can be made. As momentum in the area builds, a complete landscape plan may be in order to outline and organize the finite details of future landscaping projects. In the meantime, any public improvements will begin at the I-77 off ramps and radiate out from that point in future phases. It has been suggested that private implementation of any landscaping plan should be incentivized with tax credits, future density bonuses, or other “carrots” to ensure its realization.

Any plantings or installations in the right of way should follow guiding principles in SCDOT’s Access and Roadside Management Manual (ARMS) pertaining to landscaping guidelines, section 9E. The manual provides guidance on necessary considerations such as native, low maintenance plantings, irrigation, setbacks, and etcetera.



Figure 12: Existing Concrete Median Seen Entering Carowinds Blvd. Off of I-77 South



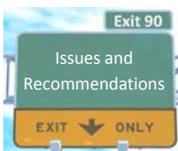
Figure 13: Appearance of Concrete Median Following Recommended Improvements



Figure 14: Example of a Planted Median in Rock Hill, SC



Figure 15: Example of a Landscaped Median in Rock Hill, SC



## Transportation

### Vehicular Congestion, Safety and Connectivity

The Exit 90 area is tremendously autocentric due to its proximity to I-77 and other heavily traveled state and federal highways; the presence of destination shopping and entertainment locations such as Narroway Productions, Carowinds, and Plaza Fiesta; as well as the location of several distribution centers in the area. Further compounding the issue are several intersections that are problematic due to poor alignment, merging traffic (most notably off of I-77 South), and the reduction in the number of travel lanes when exiting the interstate off ramps.

In addition to the presence of several traffic generators, there is a general absence of internal connectivity in the area and an excess of individual curbcuts. This forces motorists to perform left turn movements onto and off of Carowinds Boulevard, although the desired destination maybe only a few hundred feet away.

### Recommendations: Congestion, Safety and Connectivity

Three projects are currently approved in the Exit 90 / Carowinds Boulevard area as 2003 Pennies for Progress Projects. Unfortunately, these projects are listed at the end of the 2003 priority list and are currently unfunded. They now rely on funding from the proposed upcoming 2010 Pennies for Progress referendum or another funding source. Because these projects will make the most significant improvements in the area, they should be recognized as being the top priority. They include:

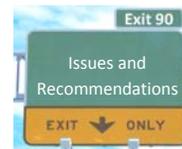
- **SC Highway 51** (US Highway 21 to NC State Line) - five lane widening
- **Springhill Farm Road** (SC Highway 51 to US Hwy 21) - five lane widening

Other projects have received funding via a CMAQ grant. These include

- **Springhill Farm Road** - addition of a direct lane onto I-77 northbound to accommodate Wells Fargo afternoon peak traffic flow
- **SC 51 / US 21 intersection** – new intersection located closer to Springhill Farm Road

York County transportation staff and SCDOT engineers collaborated on outlining several other projects focused on relieving congestion and improving safety. These projects will be implemented as midterm and long term projects. Currently, they are all unfunded. Each is shown in Figure 16.

- **Monorail Drive** - remove berm and continue two way traffic
- **Festival Drive** – remove partial one-way traffic flow and permit two-way traffic; limit access with Carowinds Blvd to a right-in / right-out scenario
- **Carowinds Boulevard** - install raised median to eliminate dangerous left turn movements across oncoming traffic
- **I-77** - new / expanded south bound onramp to eliminate congestion and backups onto Carowinds Boulevard



In order to further improve congestion issues in the area, the current lack of connectivity must be addressed. Figure 16 illustrates examples of how road connections should be made. These roads should be added as new commercial and residential developments come in to the area. This internal connectivity will allow multiple paths between destinations, thereby reducing sole reliance on Carowinds Boulevard. In addition, by adding new internal connectivity, pedestrian activity will be fostered through safer and more direct routes between uses.

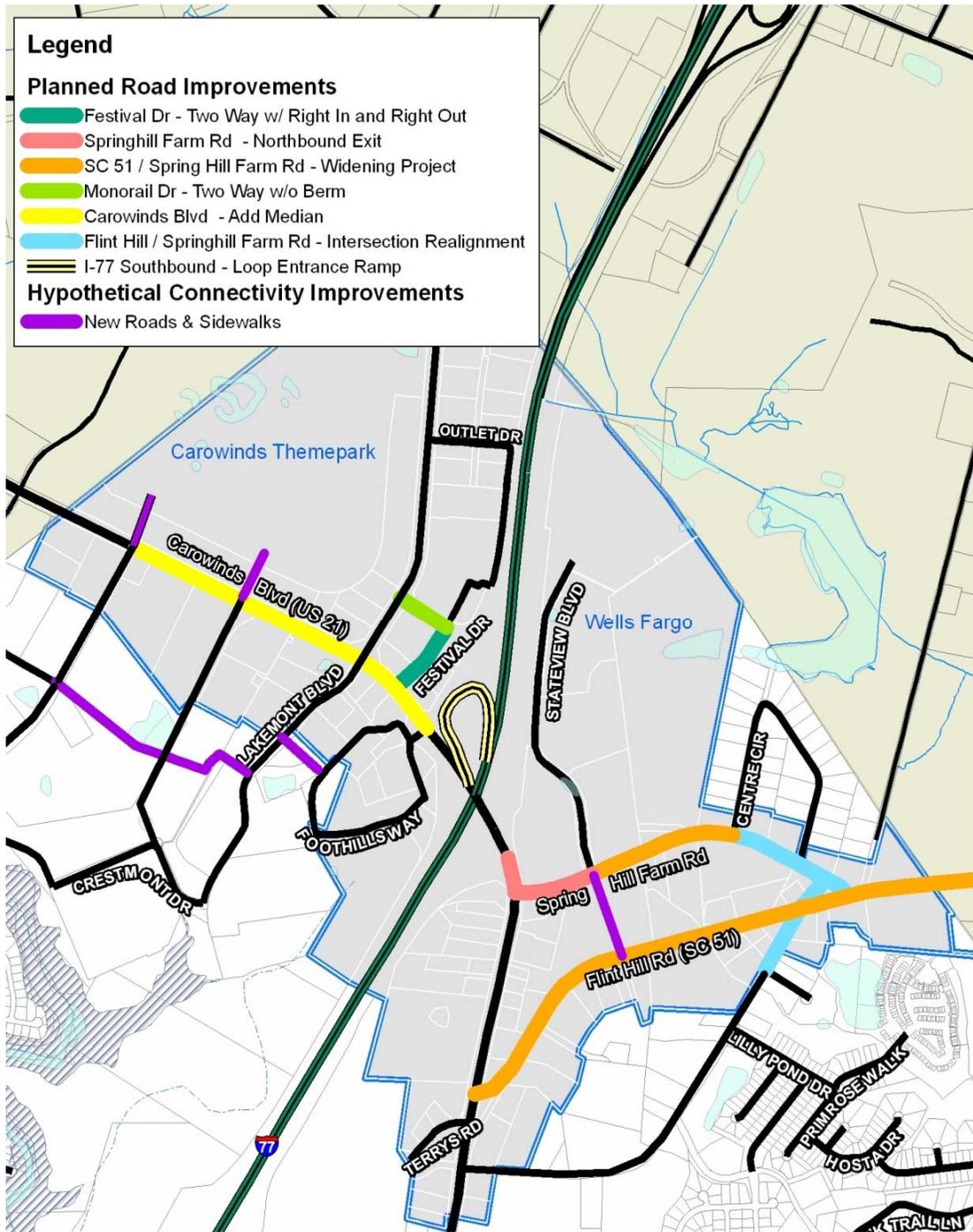


Figure 16: Various Potential Projects and Congestion Relieving Improvements

## **Pedestrian Connectivity**

Currently, pedestrian connectivity is nonexistent with no crosswalks or sidewalks in the entire study area, with the exception of Stateview Boulevard, which accesses only the Wells Fargo office campus. This causes the pedestrian environment to be treacherous. This issue is not exclusive to the Exit 90 area, as it is common across York County. For this reason, ordinances have been proposed to address this issue, and two are already adopted. This includes Sidewalk Standards (York County Code of Ordinances 154.112(C)). The sidewalk ordinance was added to the code of ordinances in 2010 and is intended to specify the location and requirements for sidewalks. In addition, Commercial Development Design guidelines were adopted in the Interim Development Ordinance in 2007 that address connectivity and pedestrian access within commercial developments.

### **Recommendations: Pedestrian Connectivity**

The most obvious recommendation to increase walkability and connectivity in the Exit 90 area is the enforcement of existing standards and ordinances.

- The Commercial Design Standards require that all new non-residential buildings be compact, interconnected and walkable.
- All road improvement projects and road construction projects should include sidewalks as recommended by the existing sidewalk ordinance. These connections should be phased in over the coming years to provide access to all points along the major roads as well as access across via crosswalks and sidewalks buffered from roads with planting strips, eventually adding them to Carowinds Boulevard once demand in increases and safety is improved.
- This issue will continue to be addressed in Section 152 of the future Unified Development Ordinance regarding road connectivity, currently under stakeholder review and likely to be adopted in 2011. This will add more specific language to the existing requirements.



Figure 17: Existing SC 51 road frontage



Figure 18: Potential SC 51 road frontage with Recommended Pedestrian Improvements

## Regulatory

### 2025 Land Use Plan

The 2025 Land Use Plan and Land Use Plan Map, adopted by the York County Council in 2004, are documents that guide decision making on growth, development, quality of life and related issues in York County through the year 2025. Based on stakeholder input calling for additional retail and office development in the Exit 90 / Carowinds Boulevard area, changes to the 2025 Land Use Map will be necessary to more accurately reflect this vision. Further changes will be made to reflect the presence of a planned Bus Rapid Transit corridor and other 2025 Land Use Map changes necessary to reflect the urbanizing landscape in the Exit 90 area.

### **Recommendations: 2025 Land Use Plan**

Two major changes are recommended for the 2025 Land Use Map.

The first change is in order to accommodate office and retail uses as specified in the survey distributed early in the planning process. To facilitate this development it is recommended that the 2025 Land Use Map be amended, changing a portion of land east of I-77 and south of Carowinds Boulevard from a light industrial to a mix of commercial and / or multifamily land uses. Although the multifamily land use was not nearly as popular among stakeholders as commercial uses, additional rooftops are crucial to recruiting and attracting additional retailers, restaurants, and service related businesses; and land owners may be able to benefit from additional flexibility.

The second change is due to the planned bus rapid transit (BRT) corridor running along US 21 to SC 51. In conjunction with this corridor, a transit node has been tentatively located at the corner of SC 51 and Carowinds Boulevard by the Rock Hill-Fort Mill Transit Study (RFATS), the regional transit planning organization. To reflect the possibility of this transit station coming to fruition, future land uses within a walkable ½ mile of the station should be changed to mixed use. This will guide the current uses toward a transit oriented pattern of development more conducive to supporting the densities associated with this type of infrastructure improvement.

Additional amendments to the 2025 Land Use Map are necessary to reclassify areas designated as Planned Development along SC 51. This land use is entirely inappropriate because it requires all landowners to negotiate development and leaves little room to rezone to a district where “by right” uses are allowed.

It is important to note that the Land Use Map does not constitute a rezoning of property; it does not prohibit the owner from rezoning their property to a use not specified for the area; and it does not deny the property owner the ability to use the property under its current zoning. However, it does reflect the most logical progression of the built environment based on a myriad of factors.

Figure 19 represents the current 2025 Land Use map designations, and Figure 20 shows the recommended amendments.



Figure 19: Current 2025 Land Use Map Designations

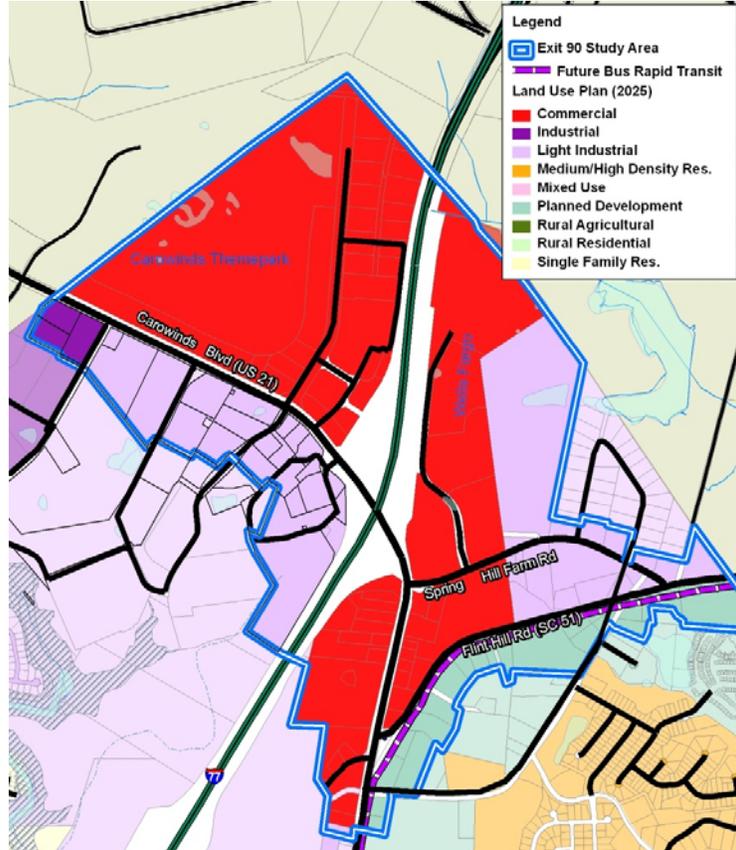
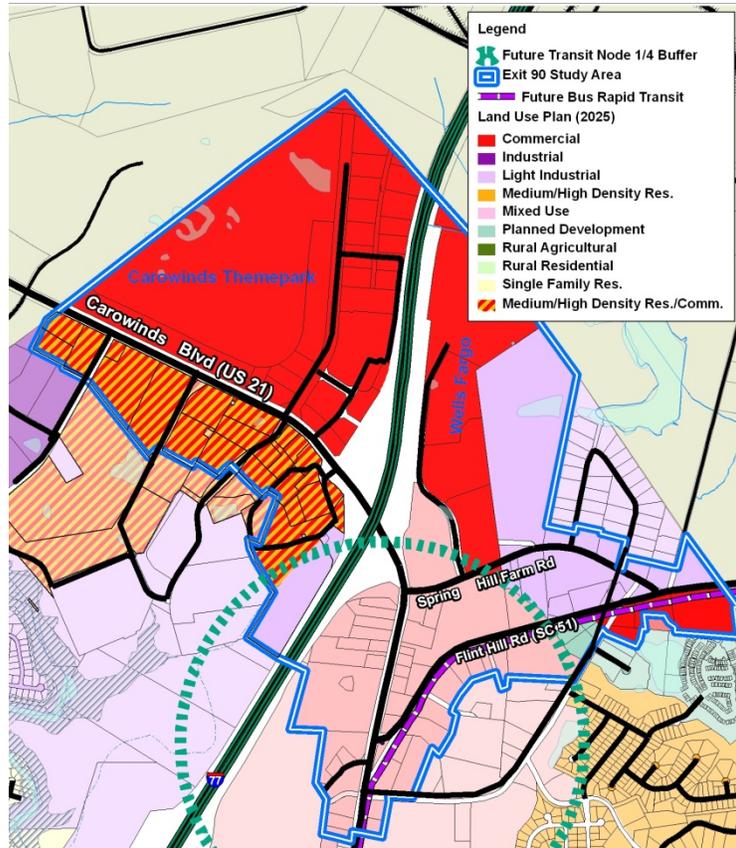


Figure 20: Recommended Amendments to the 2025 Land Use Map



## Zoning

The entire Exit 90 study area is zoned Urban Development (UD). This zoning has been recognized as being highly desirable for many land owners because it is, by far, the most flexible zoning district in the county, allowing nearly any use. This district also has a downside based on the level of flexibility. Although property owners in the area have the full right to build nearly any use imaginable under the current zoning, it also gives their neighbor the exact same ability. The result of this has been the “hodgepodge” of conflicting land use types that exist in the area ranging from a concrete plant, to small retailers, to distribution centers. This creates a high level of uncertainty to developers, potentially causing them to steer clear of residential projects and higher end retail projects where tenants and buyers may be slightly more fickle when it comes to their surroundings.

### Recommendations: Zoning

The UD zoning district is problematic in that it will continue to allow the current development pattern in the Exit 90 area to continue. This leaves only one option, to rezone parcels from UD to another zoning district. Understandably, this is a highly sensitive matter and rightfully so, because many land owners purchased their property with the knowledge and full expectation that they would have full flexibility with their land. Because of the sensitivity of this issue, this may take a considerable amount of time to resolve in a way that allows the current owners to achieve their investment backed expectations without impeding on the investments of neighboring property owners.

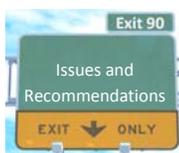
Other zoning related topics such as Commercial Design Standards and the Arterial Roads Overlay District are discussed as part of the assets portion of this document.

## Economic Development

### Lack of Business Diversity

One major concern among stakeholders is the ongoing lack of business diversity in the area. Currently, businesses in the area are limited to large office campuses, gas stations, manufacturers / distributors, and a major theme park. According the survey results, there is a common desire to add supplementary office development, restaurants, and shopping. Some stakeholders are interested in adding a major destination retailer as the anchor for these uses, and many agree that a catalyst project will be necessary to spur this type of development. Unfortunately, the vision for more diverse offerings in the Exit 90 area is being inhibited by four key factors:

- The lack of full time residents within the immediate area;
- The presence of other major destination retailers within relatively close proximity including Pineville, South Park, and Concord Mills in NC and Gaffney, SC;
- Poor aesthetics, and
- Uncertainty of the regulatory climate.



## **Recommendations: Lack of Business Diversity**

Until a conglomeration of retailers and services are established, shoppers will continue to pass into Pineville and Charlotte because of their convenience and proximity to other businesses and offices. Because of this, recruitment of an anchor / catalyst is widely agreed as the best route to building the momentum to attracting additional retail and service oriented uses. However, setting a stage that will better facilitate this difficult task entails no one solution. This is evident by the efforts of local real estate brokers and economic development officials who work to make this a reality.

Of course, some elements needed to attract a major retailer will be addressed through amendments to the 2025 Land Use Map. Others will be addressed via aesthetic and infrastructure improvements. One component that may be helpful is an updated retail gap analysis based on the 2010 Census figures. However, no one strategy can be relied upon to address this issue; it must be a combination of several tactics and partnerships between different interests over a sustained period of time to create the environment for change.

## **Identity**

Adding further identity and recognition to the Exit 90 / Carowinds Boulevard area with a more formal welcome sign has been a point of discussion that has emerged over the past few years. Examples of these types of signs can be seen in the welcome signs found entering the state on I-95 in Dillon and Hardeeville.



Figure 21: Monument Signs at Other SC Gateways

The current welcome sign, adjacent to an LED sign located in North Carolina, is completely overshadowed as eyes are naturally drawn to the bigger and brighter sign. These monuments are integral to making a first impression on those entering the Palmetto State. In addition, the installation of a sign of this type will add to the identity and recognition of the Exit 90 / Carowinds Boulevard area, as well as a gateway to the State of South Carolina.

## **Recommendations: Identity**

The SCDOT offers competitive funding for installing these types of enhancements through the Adopt an Interchange Program. This program provides opportunities for local government agencies to work with SCDOT in landscaping and irrigating Interstate interchanges. Adopt an Interchange funds can pay up to 80% when local government agencies provide the minimum 20% matching funds. The applicant must be willing to provide perpetual year round vegetation maintenance by signing a long-term maintenance agreement.

Long-term maintenance commitments caused difficulties in the past that led to the ultimate demise of this idea in the past. As the stakeholders of the Exit 90 / Carowinds Boulevard area look to move the area forward with an understanding that partnerships will be integral to the overall success of the plan, a joint effort to upkeep maintenance may be a possible scenario that could make this installation a reality. In fact, one group has notified staff that they are interested in working with the county in this capacity. Hopefully, others will also see the value in this opportunity and seek to participate as well.

## **Stakeholder Engagement**

### **Organization and Participation**

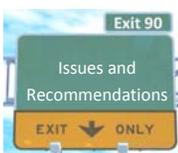
Throughout this plan, there are several instances where part of the solution to an existing issue includes some level of participation and partnership among stakeholders. Unfortunately, this element is an issue itself. However, the level of interest in the creation of this Master Plan is evidence that there is concern for the improvement of the area among a large group of stakeholders.

In the future it is imperative that all stakeholders interested in improving the issues related to the Exit 90 / Carowinds Boulevard area commit to doing so. Commitment to improvement is not limited to only the private entities and operators in the area. York County has begun efforts to improve the infrastructure and appearance of the area and is willing to cooperate with any land or business owner willing contribute as well.

### **Recommendations: Organization and Participation**

In order to increase and maintain stakeholder participation and organization, the following options are recommended. Although these are not exhaustive, they provide the foundation for base level organization and open the pathways of communication, which is important to notify others of events, issues, or opportunities in the area.

- Continue to utilize the Google Groups page to post information regarding private property improvements, code enforcement issues, as well as building a unified voice in addressing significant issues such as public funding, improvements, and investment.



- Remain engaged in growing value in the area by partnering with the county and other stakeholders to implement this plan, other business and land owners to do the same, and taking advantage of future opportunities to incrementally improve the area.
- Form a business association or join an existing business association. The Arrowood Business Association is a nonprofit organization composed of businesses located within the defined Arrowood area and whose stated purpose “is to foster mutual benefit, encourage business among members and to improve the work area environment through active participation within the community”. Because the boundaries of this well established business association already encompass the Exit 90 area this may be the most efficient way to begin building partnerships to create change in the community.



Figure 22: Arrowood Business Association Territory

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

The improvement of the Exit 90 area requires a commitment from all stakeholders. The importance of this fact cannot be overstated. The following is a compilation of the recommendations included throughout this plan and an associated timeline for their implementation. Timelines are broken into three term lengths; short, medium and long. Each date is measured from the adoption date of this plan, anticipated in November XX, 2010

Cost estimates for each recommendation are included where they could be reasonably calculated. The cost of long term tasks have not been included because of the potential of price fluctuations that will take place before the initiative is implemented. Tasks that will be accomplished using York County and South Carolina Government staffs, or “in-house”, are not included as it is assumed these are factored into normal government operating costs.

### **Aesthetics**

#### **Ongoing Tasks**

- Continuously report any perceived building code violations. In order to report a violation, contact:

York County Planning and Development Services  
1070 Heckle Boulevard  
Rock Hill, SC 29732  
803-909-7200

- Actively seek partners to maintain and aid in upkeep of public plantings.

#### **Short Term Tasks (0 to 2 years)**

- Coordinate with the SCDOT to reduce unnecessary signage or find other methods to create the desired outcome.

This is the responsibility of York County and should be able to be done for minimal cost.

- Complete and adopt a full scale Landscape Master Plan including areas for improvements, types of improvements, costs, phasing, and maintenance details. This plan must include stakeholder input and guidance from the SCDOT.

The cost of a complete plan authored by a consultant often runs in excess of \$30,000. Costs to prepare a Landscape Master Plan can be minimized by producing it “in-house” with periodic reviews and limited graphics provided by a consulting landscape architect. Calculations, based on estimates from a local landscape architecture firm, are as low as \$5,000 for a complete plan with York County staff coordinating and undertaking a vast majority of the work.



- Begin improvements in conjunction with the Landscape Master Plan. One primary candidate for the Phase I of this plan is to build on an existing asset, the well landscaped entrance of the Lakemont Business Park and the adjacent Cracker Barrel restaurant. By adding landscaping improvements to the Carowinds entrance to resemble the height, seasonal colors, and depth of the entrance at the Lakemont business park, a focal point will be created from which future improvements can be made. Initial landscaping costs will be based purely on the type, size and irrigation details if any. Preliminary estimates provided by a local landscape architect approximate these Phase I improvements at a cost of \$15,000 based on a site inspection and right of way details.



Figure 23: Entrance to the Lakemont Business Park

Costs to install the improvements vary widely based on planting and irrigation details. The approximate cost for installation of landscaped medians such as the one in Figure 24 is \$15 to \$19 per square foot. This includes all construction, planting materials, and irrigation. Landscaping installations at the edge of the right-of- way are significantly less expensive to install and maintain. Potential funding sources include enhancement funds included in federal transportation legislation. This transportation finance bill requires that a small portion of funds go to projects such as this. Other potential sources include the State of South Carolina.



Figure 24: Landscaped median on US 21 in Rock Hill, SC

According to a local municipal property maintenance supervisor, maintenance is minimal for plantings utilizing native, drought tolerant plants. Drip irrigation, typical of landscaped medians, is highly efficient and requires less water than traditional above ground sprinklers. Re-mulching is required every two years. Two local stakeholders have come forward to date offering to aid in the maintenance of these plantings.

- Work with business owners who have road frontage visibility issues to unify under a common shopping complex name and install a permanent multitenant sign. This task is mutually beneficial for business owners with visibility issues and the Exit 90 area as a whole by reducing the number of illegal off premise signs while improving the visibility of businesses located off of the right of way.

The costs for this will be the responsibility of the private business owners interested in obtaining legal off premise signage.

### **Medium Term (3 to 5 years)**

- Continue the implementation of the Landscape Master Plan.

Again, costs for landscaping will be based purely size and type of the landscaped area, the variety of plants installed, as well as irrigation design, if any. These costs and their phasing will be better defined in the complete Landscape Master Plan.

- Install a more attractive control of access fence and the appropriate landscaping to replace / accompany SCDOT fencing.

One option for this project is split rail, ranch style fencing as shown in Figure 10, similar to what was installed along the Dave Lyle Boulevard Exit. Conservative estimates for this fencing material and installation are approximately \$9.00 per foot based quotes from local vendors. If the first phase on fencing is installed only along the area adjacent to I-77 south from the northern edge of Plaza Fiesta to Carowinds Boulevard, approximately 3100 feet, the cost would be approximately \$27,900. Other options may be investigated when this project reached initial stages of implementation.

Additional fencing added gradually throughout the area may help create a uniform appearance and should be addressed in the forthcoming Landscape Master Plan.

### **Long Term (6+ years)**

- Implement a wayfinding strategy to reduce sign clutter and improve the safety and efficiency of automobile and pedestrian circulation.
- Complete installations recommended by the Landscape Master Plan

## **Transportation**

### **Ongoing Tasks**

- Increasing interconnectivity for both automobiles and pedestrians should be implemented in future developments and large scale redevelopment projects. These connections should provide access to all points along Carowinds Boulevard with sidewalks buffered from roads with planting strips. In addition, there should be safe points to cross Carowinds Boulevard and other roadways with well marked and signalized crosswalks.

The cost and responsibility for this initiative will be based on the types of connections made. York County is currently working to increase connectivity with select projects, and private developers will be responsible for implementing automobile and pedestrian connectivity in the future due to existing ordinances.



- Sidewalks should be phased in over the coming years, eventually adding them to Carowinds Boulevard once demand increases and safety is improved.

**Short Term Tasks (1 to 3 years)**

- Implement 2009-2010 CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation Air Quality) grant funded projects:

*Phase 1:*

Springhill Farm Road – Provide free-flow right turn lane on Springhill Farm Road from the intersection of Stateview Boulevard to the northbound on-ramp for I-77

*Phase 2:*

Springhill Farm Road – Abandon approximately 350-feet of Springhill Farm Road to eliminate the existing merge condition

Springhill Farm Road – Reconfiguring the existing intersection of Springhill Farm Road and Flint Hill Road to a standard ninety degree crossing

*Phase 3:*

Highway 51 – Provide southbound double left turn lanes from Highway 21 (Carowinds Blvd) onto Highway 51

Highway 21 – Extend the existing median along Highway 21 to create more controlled turn movements

Complete implementation cost for all phases total \$2,250,500. This project is funded and will be administered by the SCDOT.

**Medium Term (3 to 5 years)**

- Implement unfunded 2003 Pennies Projects:

SC Highway 51 (US Highway 21 to NC State Line) – Upgrade SC Highway 51 to a five-lane section including a center turn lane with curb and gutter and also install sidewalks

SC 51 / US 21 intersection – Install a new intersection located closer to Springhill Farm Road by using existing SCDOT right of way. This will aid in the realignment of the intersection and move it closer to the core of the Exit 90 / Carowinds Boulevard area.

The project cost is \$11.4 million.

Springhill Farm Road (SC Highway 51 to US Hwy 21) – Upgrade Springhill Farm Road to a five-lane urban road section including a center turn lane, curb and gutter, and sidewalks

The project cost is \$10.9 million.



- Implement future CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation Air Quality) grant projects

Monorail Drive – Remove berm from center of Monorail Drive, consolidate the lanes to form a standard two way traffic road

Festival Drive – Reconfigure entrance to allow two way traffic with only right-in / right-out turn movements

Carowinds Boulevard – Install raised median to eliminate dangerous left turn movements across oncoming traffic

The estimated cost project is \$945,000.

### **Long Term (6+ years)**

- I-77 – Build new / expanded south bound onramp to eliminate congestion and backups onto Carowinds Boulevard

## **Regulatory**

### **Ongoing Tasks**

- Continue the full implementation of the Arterial Roads Overlay and Commercial Design Standards in order to create more aesthetically pleasing development with better auto and pedestrian connections.

### **Short Term Tasks (1 to 3 years)**

- Make amendments to the 2025 Land Use Map as recommended in order to foster the type of development envisioned by the stakeholders.

### **Medium Term (3 to 5 years)**

- Finalize and adopt the Unified Development Ordinance. This will create a more consistent regulatory environment for developers, increase connectivity, and create more flexibility.
- Pass general non-residential building maintenance standards in order to provide an equitable and practicable method for addressing non-residential buildings and premises that cause endangerment to the health, safety, or welfare of the general public. This may include blighted buildings that diminish property values or detract excessively from the appropriate appearance of the area.



### **Long Term (6+ years)**

- Eliminate all UD zoning in the study area and York County. Because of the sensitivity of this issue, this may take a considerable amount of time to resolve in a way that allows the current owners to achieve their investment backed expectations without impeding on the investments of neighboring property owners.

## **Economic Development**

### **Ongoing Tasks**

- Continue efforts to attract a catalyst project through infrastructure and aesthetic improvements as suggested throughout this plan.

### **Short Term Tasks (1 to 3 years)**

- Update / create a retail gap analysis based on the 2010 Census figures in order to better understand the existing market conditions. This can be completed in-house with updated Census, Board of Labor Statistics, and other data sources. Some funding may be necessary to access specific retail information via specialized data websites. The maximum cost for data is approximately \$1,200 based on the advertised rates of Claritas.com.
- Develop a landscape and maintenance detail for a gateway monument welcoming motorists to South Carolina. This must be stamped by a registered landscape architect as required by the SCDOT for the Adopt an Interchange Program. The cost of stamped construction documents for a basic monument with landscaping and irrigation details costs approximately \$15,000 according to a local landscape architecture firm.

### **Long Term (6+ years)**

- Implement improvements through the SCDOT's Adopt an Interchange Program. This will increase the area's visibility and provide an identity for the area. Although this program funds 80% of improvements, York County must cover the additional costs as well as the periodic maintenance for any plantings associated with the gateway monument. Although it would be ideal to install a monument of this type in the short-term. The more elaborate gateway monuments, as seen in Figure 21, cost approximately \$1 million according to the SCDOT. It is likely that a monument in the gore area of the Exit 90 interchange would cost significantly less considering the space available.

In addition to the construction and installation costs, ongoing maintenance must be considered. The large monument in Dillon, SC which includes a very large water feature and elaborate landscaping costs approximately \$1200 per month according to a local official.



This should be considered an absolute maximum cost possible for a potential gateway monument on I-77. Figure 25 illustrates a much simpler gateway monument which would be a fraction of the cost to construct and maintain. As the concept moves forward, the balance between simple and elaborate must be found based on construction costs, maintenance details, and other considerations.



**Figure 25: Simple welcome monument**

## Stakeholder Organization and Participation

### Ongoing Tasks

- Continue to utilize the Google Groups page to post information regarding private property improvements, codes enforcement, as well as a building a unified voice in addressing significant issues such as public funding, improvements, and investment.

### Short Term Tasks (1 to 3 years)

- Join an existing business association, such as the Arrowood Business Association, or create a business association to coordinate and implement the goals of this plan



# **APPENDIX**

## **Survey Results**

The results from the survey distributed to all land and business owners in the Exit 90 study area are included below. All responses have been quantified where possible. Other qualitative responses are left in their original form and grouped where duplicative or similar. The responses have not been edited in any way, and all responses are included.

<b><u>What is your association to Exit 90?</u></b>	<b><u>% of Total</u></b>
Business owner or representative	38.89%
Land owner or representative	33.33%
Employee	16.67%
Resident	5.56%
Elected official	5.56%
Other	0.00%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

<b><u>In what subsection of the Exit 90 area is your association?</u></b>	<b><u>% of Total</u></b>
Other	22.22%
SC Highway 51	22.22%
Carowinds Blvd - behind buildings / behind road frontage	22.22%
Carowinds Blvd - road frontage	16.67%
SC Highway 21	16.67%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

### **What is the first word or phrase that comes to mind when you think of Exit 90?**

Carowinds	Eyesore	Outdated and run down,
Carowinds	Shabby	if I have company coming into
Carowinds	Ugly	town I have them exit 77 at
Carowinds	Functionally and visually obsolete	Baxter or Gold Hill Road
Carowinds	Run down	Dangerous merging
Carowinds	Mess / hodgepodge	Scary, no lighting at night
Carowinds exit	Unattractive	Mismatch
	Dated	Poor landscaping
		1 <sup>st</sup> Exit in South Carolina



**What are the most positive aspects of Exit 90?**

Amusement Park  
Carowinds  
None, possibly the novelty of the new roller coaster  
Carowinds  
Narrowway  
  
Access to I-77  
Access to I-77  
Access to I-77  
  
Location  
Location to gateway to SC and Charlotte  
Location busy - lots of traffic and opportunities  
Location close to Charlotte  
Gateway  
Tourism  
Its potential  
Potential for something special  
Gateway/entrance to York County and State of SC  
  
None  
Being in SC  
Police and fire service  
Convenient gas stations  
Ample gas stations  
  
New Wells Fargo buildings  
New job creation  
  
Traffic (in comparison to Charlotte)  
Good exit ramp flow  
Wide road  
Good traffic flow  
Exit lanes are wide

**What are the least positive aspects of Exit 90?**

Intersection and traffic dysfunctional and dangerous  
Lack of traffic enforcement / lack of yield signs  
Traffic congestion  
Difficult merge off of I-77 south  
Entrance ramp onto I-77 backs up  
  
Lottery and gambling joints  
Fireworks places  
Fireworks  
All the left over gambling joints  
Firework stands and old gambling locations  
Too many fireworks places  
  
Aesthetics  
Junky development  
Lack of universal appeal  
Truly unappealing - aesthetically  
Poor landscaping  
Visually unappealing  
Hotel looks horrible  
Hodgepodge of existing run-down buildings  
  
No real apparent planning went into developing area  
Sign clutter  
Lack of character  
  
Needs to be dressed up with classier businesses  
Plaza hotel has a bad reputation  
Low class businesses  
There are swinger clubs in the area.  
Not enough upper end eating choices.  
The shopping center looks cheap - metal roof, minimal windows & decorative features



**If you could choose ANY one project, effort or initiative that you think would most benefit the Exit 90 area as a whole, what would it be?**

Improve Road Conditions on Hwy 21 South  
Cloverleaf interchange  
Road improvements to handle volume of cars generated by Carowinds  
Road improvements  
Four lane road (21 and Flint Hill)  
Widening of entrance ramp  
Very hard to get on 1-77 S heading W on Carowinds due to high traffic  
SC 21 & 51 are crowded and confusing  
A place for public transportation into uptown Charlotte

Major shielding using cypress trees  
Landscaping- creating the appearance of the Ballantyne Area  
Landscaping plan (medians and Carowinds frontage)  
Landscape

More upscale businesses (commercial and office)  
Increased retail  
Attracting retail  
Additional office parks  
Something like Birkdale Village  
New business

Correct the zoning, and much more  
Lighting  
Sign visibility  
SC welcome monument sign  
Prohibit firework sales  
Demolition of trashy buildings

This effort of master planning  
Getting the ordinances revised so future development must follow an Area Plan  
Planning  
Masterplan to help mold future land use/development



**Is there anything that you would NOT like to see in the Exit 90 area in the future?**

Industrial parks	More lotto and firework stores Lottery
Steel/metal buildings	Fireworks and similar business
More junk buildings and signs	More firework places More firework stores
Impede traffic ingress / egress	More fastfood
An overreaching misguided overlay district	Highway associated business- gas stations, fast food, conv. stores.
Adult entertainment	Inaction
Adult entertainment	Do nothing
	More of the same

**What uses would you most like to see come to the Exit 90 area?**

Office	19.64%
Restaurants	19.64%
Shopping	17.86%
Festivals and events	10.71%
Recreation	10.71%
Arts and entertainment	10.71%
Housing / Hotels	10.71%
Industry / Manufacturing	3.57%
Other	1.97%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Other: Mixed use development area with office, commercial, retail- think Ayrslley, Ballantyne, or Blakeney communities in Charlotte

**How would you rate the following things in the Exit 90 area; 10 being the best and 1 being the worst?**

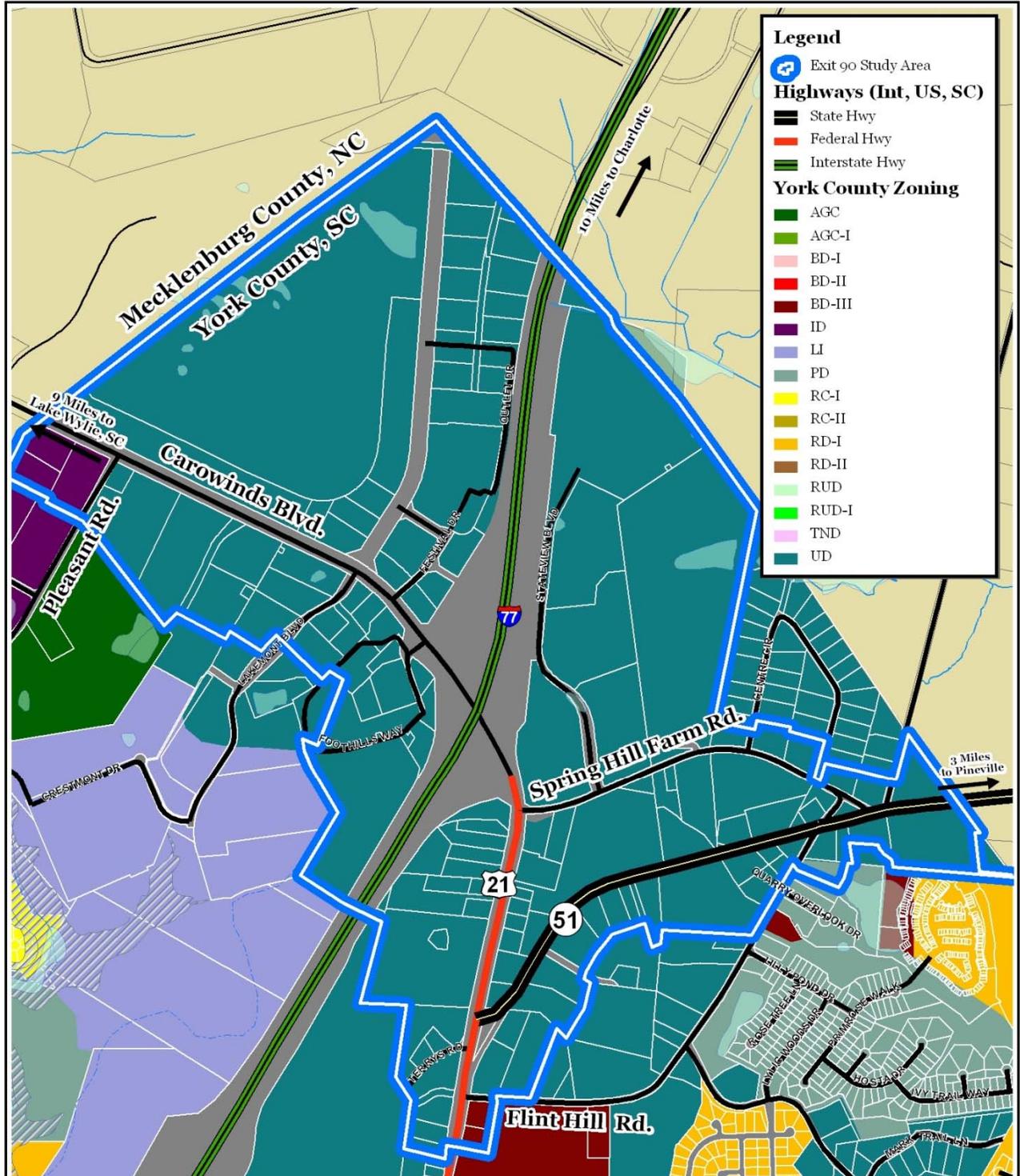
Aesthetics	2.32	- Worst
Safety	3.84	
Traffic		
Congestion	4.37	
Business climate	4.58	
Access	6.21	- Best

**Additional Comments:**

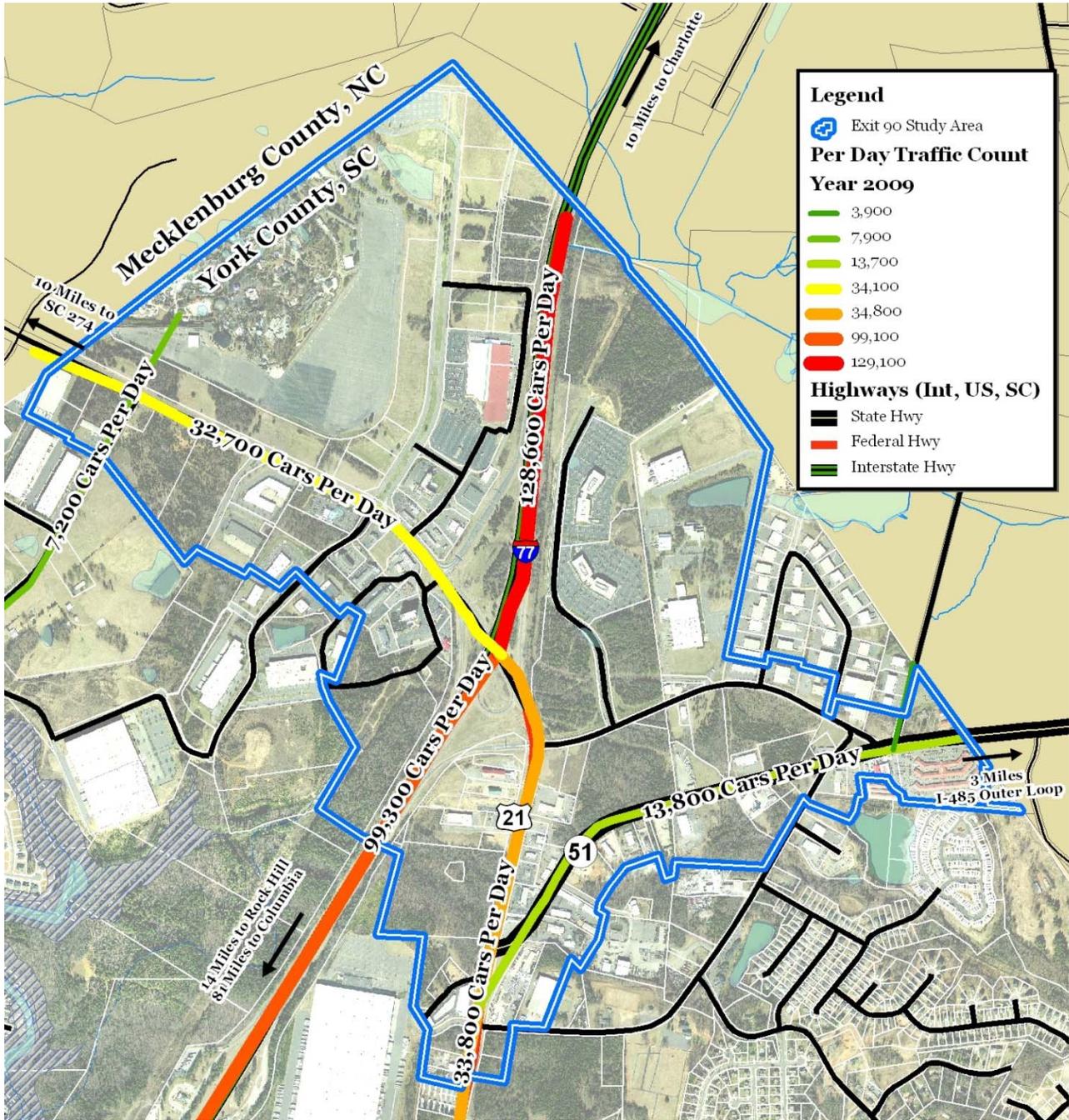
There are a lot of potential for this area and it's great that there is so much support from County Staff, local business owners, and residents to help develop ideas. It's important that time is taken to "do it right" and not rush into adopting a plan or overlay.



# Zoning Map



# Transportation Map



# Aerial Map

